

NOMINATION OF GENERAL MICHAEL V. HAYDEN TO THE POSITION OF GENERAL IN THE U.S. AIR FORCE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to Executive Calendar No. 693, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of the following named officer for appointment in the United States Air Force to the grade indicated while assigned to a position of importance and responsibility under title 10, U.S.C., section 601:

GEN Michael V. Hayden

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the confirmation of the nomination of GEN Michael V. Hayden to the position of general in the United States Air Force.

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

Senator NELSON is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I rise today as a voice to counter that of the giant multinational oil corporations. It has been during three decades of my public service that I have held fast to a promise to fight to keep big oil away from Florida's coastlines, to keep that industry from soiling our homes and from ruining our economy.

In Florida, a clean, healthy environment is the infrastructure of our tourism-driven economy, and it is the source of sustenance for millions of residents and visitors alike. In America, where we have only 3 percent of the world's oil reserves, our addiction to "black gold" will not be broken just by more drilling but by mounting an aggressive effort to fully exploit greater efficiencies in alternative fuels.

As part of my promise to Florida, I have said that I could not support an Interior Secretary who would advance this administration's willingness to acquiesce to the oil lobby and its ever-increasing desire for greater profits beyond the recent record levels.

Mr. President, I know this nominee is a person deserving of our respect. He is a gentleman. In fact, he will receive an overwhelming vote of support from the Senate. But I must stand on my principles to oppose this nomination. I do so for the future of Florida and for the future of our country.

I thank the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on Executive Calendar No. 630, the nomination of Dirk Kempthorne, of Idaho, to be Secretary of the Interior shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. The following Senators were necessarily absent: the Senator from North Carolina (Mrs. DOLE) and the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from North Carolina (Mrs. DOLE) and the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. THUNE) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. BOXER), the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. CONRAD), the Senator from Hawaii (Mr. INOUE), the Senator from West Virginia (Mr. ROCKEFELLER), and the Senator from Colorado (Mr. SALAZAR) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 85, nays 8, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 161 Ex.]

YEAS—85

| | | |
|-----------|------------|-------------|
| Akaka | Dorgan | McCain |
| Alexander | Durbin | McConnell |
| Allard | Ensign | Menendez |
| Allen | Enzi | Murkowski |
| Baucus | Feingold | Murray |
| Bayh | Feinstein | Nelson (NE) |
| Bennett | Frist | Obama |
| Bingaman | Graham | Pryor |
| Bond | Grassley | Reed |
| Brownback | Gregg | Reid |
| Bunning | Hagel | Roberts |
| Burns | Hatch | Santorum |
| Burr | Hutchison | Sarbanes |
| Byrd | Inhofe | Sessions |
| Cantwell | Isakson | Shelby |
| Carper | Jeffords | Smith |
| Chafee | Johnson | Snowe |
| Chambliss | Kennedy | Specter |
| Coburn | Kohl | Stabenow |
| Cochran | Kyl | Stevens |
| Coleman | Landrieu | Sununu |
| Collins | Lautenberg | Talent |
| Cornyn | Leahy | Thomas |
| Craig | Levin | Vitter |
| Crapo | Lieberman | Voinovich |
| DeMint | Lincoln | Warner |
| DeWine | Lott | Wyden |
| Dodd | Lugar | |
| Domenici | Martinez | |

NAYS—8

| | | |
|---------|----------|-------------|
| Biden | Harkin | Nelson (FL) |
| Clinton | Kerry | Schumer |
| Dayton | Mikulski | |

NOT VOTING—7

| | | |
|--------|-------------|-------|
| Boxer | Inouye | Thune |
| Conrad | Rockefeller | |
| Dole | Salazar | |

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 85, the nays are 8. Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to.

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I am not here to cast doubt on the qualifications of Governor Kempthorne to be the next Secretary of the Interior. In fact, I believe he is eminently qualified for the job. Unfortunately, that is also the problem. I fear that the Governor is all too qualified to take the helm of an agency that, in the past 5 years, has drastically shifted its mission from one of conservation and protection, to one of exploitation and commercialism. Governor Kempthorne's record as a Senator, where he cast one vote in favor of the environment in six years, does not give me much hope that he will be able to reverse the trend.

If we are to ensure that our grandchildren will be able to marvel at the majestic grandeur of this country's untouched wide open spaces, or learn of their Nation's heritage at our historic treasures, or observe the beauty of the astounding array of wildlife that roams the continent—it is essential that the next Secretary of the Interior recommends the Department to being a good steward of the land for all the people, and not a good server of it for the oil, mining, and timber companies. Given his consistently held positions for drilling in protected areas of the Arctic and off our coastlines, weakening the Endangered Species Act, and opposing the protection of roadless areas in National Forests, among others, I do not believe that Governor Kempthorne will make a change in the direction of the Interior Department.

I want it to be clear that the real problem is not with the nominee. The real problem is with the policies of the administration, and the willingness of the Secretary to carry them out without question. This administration has certainly been no friend to the environment, and the previous Secretary of the Interior was particularly adept at enabling its primary impulses. Whether it is in the waters off our beaches, in the sensitive lands of the Arctic, or the wild places of the West, the administration has consistently appeared to be working for the interests of the oil and gas companies first, and the interests of the public second. They have consistently pushed for opening the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge. They have proposed opening the Mid-Atlantic to oil and gas drilling—barely 75 miles off the coast of New Jersey. And, according to the Government Accountability Office, they more than tripled the number of drilling permits approved for the West—to the point where GAO found that the Bureau of Land Management was having trouble meeting its environmental responsibilities.

The administration's disdain of public lands extends to the point that they have now proposed selling it off to fund other programs or reduce the deficit. To his credit, the Governor flatly stated that he did not approve of reducing the deficit this way, but he was not nearly as clear about whether he would use public land sales to fund other programs. The Governor should not treat our public lands as if they were an inventory that needed to be gotten rid of, but rather as an asset that needs to be protected and nurtured for future generations.

In New Jersey, we don't have an overabundance of public land, which makes us value what we do have a great deal. Even in the most densely populated State in the Nation, we have a number of treasures valued by all New Jerseyans—the Pinelands, the Highlands, the Delaware Water Gap, our National Wildlife Refuges, our historic sites, and more. This is where we take our children to show them the beauty of nature, where we learn about our

past, where we take our vacations, and where we welcome visitors from other States and other countries. But many of these would not exist without the help of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The Fund has not only helped the Federal Government preserve these and other sites, it has also helped the State create parks, ballfields, and other recreation areas. Liberty State Park, a green oasis in the middle of the New Jersey metropolitan area, less than a half mile from Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, would still be a tangle of deserted railroad tracks if it wasn't for the help of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Unfortunately, the administration has been carrying on a multi-year assault on the fund, slicing it from \$573 million in 2002 to \$142 million this year, and proposing only \$85 million for 2007. For the second straight year, they have proposed eliminating the State grant program entirely. This is not the way to run a program that is supposed to provide \$900 million each year for land acquisition.

I am also very concerned about the overall direction that the National Park Service has been moving in under this administration. First, the administration has inexplicably proposed rewriting the National Park Service's management policies to take away the clear mandate to preserve the parks for future generations. We have not gotten any satisfactory answers as to why they have proposed this, but it is completely at odds with my view of why we have national parks, which is to protect our natural treasures for our children and our grandchildren. But even if the policies are not rewritten, our parks are in danger of simply falling apart. The National Parks Service faces a multibillion-dollar maintenance backlog, yet the administration has proposed slashing the account to fund that maintenance by over 30 percent.

This does not bode well for Ellis Island, where a large number of historic buildings are in danger of disappearing forever into crumbled brick because the National Park Service has been stalling for years instead of approving a redevelopment plan for the south side of the island. This part of the island belongs to New Jersey, and a dedicated nonprofit group has spent years raising millions of dollars to prepare for the rehabilitation of these structures, only to be thwarted by the National Park Service.

Right next door, the Statue of Liberty has been held hostage by fear since 9/11. The pedestal has been reopened, but visitors are still forbidden from making the unforgettable climb up to her crown to look out onto the harbor. Just yesterday, the Senate passed the amendment, offered by Senator SCHUMER and myself, that would require the Secretary of the Interior to take the necessary security precautions and open the stairway to Lady Liberty's crown once more. There

is no reason it should have taken this long to take the precautions necessary to ensure that the statue is safe to climb, and there is no reason any longer for it to be held hostage to fear.

The National Park Service is not the only agency in the Interior Department facing crippling budget cuts that threaten its very mission. Wildlife refuges throughout New Jersey are going to be losing staff in the upcoming fiscal year; at least one refuge will be left without any staff at all. The largest of our refuges, Edwin B. Forsythe, is going to have to close one of its offices, and make due with only one law enforcement officer for its 47,000 acres. This doesn't just detract from the experience for visitors. It also makes it tougher to protect against vandalism, littering, and other activities that harm the tens of thousands of birds and mammals that depend on the refuge as a sanctuary in a highly urbanized region.

This last point is extremely important. Making sure that wildlife has access to the habitat it needs to thrive is absolutely essential, particularly if endangered species are to survive. But right now the endangered species act is under attack. Last year, the other chamber passed a bill that would severely weaken a number of crucial protections under that Act, including the elimination of critical habitat. The Governor has a long record on endangered species issues, and much of it gives me great cause for concern. I hope that he will take a careful look at this issue and not simply endorse policies designed to protect developers first and endangered species second.

I have just scratched the surface of the antienvironmental policies of the current administration. As I have limited myself to discussing the Department of the Interior, I have not mentioned the misguided policies designed to rollback the progress we have made in cleaning our air, our lakes, and our rivers, or the refusal of the administration to face the facts on global warming. We quite simply might never have the time to completely cover that ground. But Governor Kempthorne has demonstrated himself in the past to be aligned with the environmental philosophy of this administration, and therefore I cannot support his nomination as Secretary of Interior. I have no illusions, however. I am fully aware that he will be confirmed, and I hope that he proves me wrong. Because we are in danger of making mistakes that we can not easily correct. And we need to reaffirm our commitment to being good stewards of the land for future generations. As Theodore Roosevelt said: "I recognize the right and duty of this generation to develop and use the natural resources of our land; but I do not recognize the right to waste them, or to rob, by wasteful use, the generations that come after us." I hope that the administration will take these words to heart.

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, I am pleased to be able to recognize the dis-

tinguished achievement of my friend and fellow Idahoan Dirk Kempthorne, who will be sworn in today as the 49th Secretary of the Interior of the United States. Throughout years of public service from mayor of Idaho's capitol, United States Senator, Governor, and now Interior Secretary, Dirk is a man of many accomplishments and is of the highest character and integrity.

I have known Dirk since the 1980s when we both served the public in Idaho. As a matter of fact, I kind of owe my current job to him, as I won his seat when he left the Senate to go back to Idaho to become Governor.

Dirk has dedicated his life to public service. From his time in the Idaho Department of Lands, as mayor, as Senator, and as Governor, he has always been recognized by those from both sides of the aisle for his tremendous leadership skills. He utilizes his thorough understanding of policy together with cultured consensus-building abilities to see the most effective policies carried out through legislation and governance. These qualities will serve the nation well as he takes on the many challenges facing the Department of the Interior in the 21st century.

Through the diversity of his public service, especially as mayor and Governor, Dirk understands the real value of federalism, one that recognizes that the Government closest to the people is asked to do the most, often with fewest resources. His service as mayor taught him the lessons that ultimately led to his leadership in many relevant and important issues during his time in the Senate.

A further reflection of that approach is his pioneering work on Endangered Species Act issues. In addition to taking his seat in the Senate, Dirk preceded me as chairman of the Environment Subcommittee with jurisdiction over species conservation. In that capacity, he led a bipartisan effort to update and improve our Nation's laws to better protect and promote the recovery of endangered and threatened species while recognizing the funding challenges. As Governor, Dirk kept up this beacon call and launched a successful public education initiative through the National Governors Association and Western Governors Association on the importance of ESA issues. Dirk is a respected national authority on resource issues and a promoter of collaborative decisionmaking to solve environmental conflicts.

As Governor, he has also forged a strong working relationship with the five nationally recognized Native American tribes that reside in Idaho. Dirk recognizes the complexity of our trustee relationship with our tribes and has continuously sought to work cooperatively on matters that affect both the State and Native Americans.

As chief steward of Idaho for the past 8 years, Dirk has vigorously championed innovation in environmental and natural resource sciences. Under

his guidance, the State has taken a leadership role in applying scientific and technological innovation and research to the complex world of environmental and natural resource management. Dirk has also worked to advance the environmental mission of the Department of Energy's Idaho National Laboratory. He understands that Idaho's diversifying economy and unique resources require a dynamic mix of natural resource protection, appropriate rural economic development, and smooth integration of scientific advancements, educational research, and business know-how.

Following the wildfires of 2000, Dirk worked with his fellow Governors and Federal officials to help bring a new approach to forest health and wildfire management. Under his leadership, Idaho has established effective and well-received wolf and grizzly bear management plans aimed at enhancing the State's responsibilities as Federal management is removed.

There is no question in my mind that Dirk Kempthorne will make a superlative Secretary and establish a proud and esteemed legacy, and I congratulate him on this remarkable achievement and high honor.

Mr. LAUTENBERG. Mr. President, the position we are voting on, Secretary of the Interior Department, holds great importance for our country. The Department determines the fate of many of our public lands, including national parks and wildlife refuges. Of great importance to New Jersey, the Secretary of Interior determines what activities can take place on the Outer Continental Shelf. The Secretary of Interior implements critical laws like the Endangered Species Act, and administers some of our most important conservation programs like the Land and Water Conservation Fund. It should be a job for somebody who believes in protecting our nation's great natural heritage, not selling it off to the highest bidder.

I served in the Senate with Governor Kempthorne, and we were members of the Environment and Public Works Committee at the same time. He is a skilled legislator and a congenial person, and I will vote to invoke cloture on his nomination, and for his confirmation. But I do want to take this opportunity to express some concerns about Governor Kempthorne's record on the environment, and about the Bush administration's record, as well.

The League of Conservation Voters has given Governor Kempthorne a lifetime score of 1 percent, meaning he voted against the environment as judged by LCV 99 percent of the time. That does not give me great confidence on how he will address issues of preserving wilderness, protecting wildlife, or defending our coastal waters. Of course, these are areas where the administration has already compiled a poor record.

I am also concerned about whether Governor Kempthorne will continue

the pattern of pressuring scientists to alter their views to suit ill-advised Bush administration policies.

Last year, we learned that an administration official named Philip Cooney—an oil lobbyist before and after his White House stint—had altered scientific documents to change their conclusions about global warming. This year, we have seen numerous reports of Bush administration political appointees trying to intimidate and muzzle climate scientists at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Similar concerns have been raised at Interior-based agencies. Twenty percent of Interior scientists who answered a survey by the Union of Concerned Scientists responded that they had been “directed to inappropriately exclude or alter technical information from a scientific document.” Moreover, 44 percent of the respondents said that they have been “directed, for non-scientific reasons, to refrain from making findings that are protective of species.”

The Fish & Wildlife Service fired a whistleblower who exposed the Bush administration's use of flawed science to favor development projects over protecting habitat for the Florida Panther.

This administration's contempt for science is deeply disturbing, and it would be a great disappointment if Governor Kempthorne were to continue to pursue policies based on ignoring, suppressing, or intimidating scientists.

Our country is blessed with countless national treasures from coast to coast and, in my view, the Interior Secretary's most important job is to restore and preserve those treasures. Despite the serious reservations I have raised here, I will support this nomination in the hope that Governor Kempthorne will shift this administration's unwise policy emphasis on development over preservation, and I urge him to respect unfettered scientific inquiry in the agencies he will oversee.

Mr. FEINGOLD. Mr. President, I am mindful of Wisconsin's historic dedication to conservation and am keenly aware of the legacy of Gaylord Nelson, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Sigurd Olson. My constituents regularly remind me of Wisconsin's environmental heritage and they expect their leaders to help build a positive environmental future.

As the Secretary of the Interior, Governor Kempthorne will have the opportunity to chart a responsible course for managing our Nation's public lands—a course very different from the one that the American people have endured over the past 5 years. I am encouraged by Governor Kempthorne's reputation for collaboration and consensus. While Governor Kempthorne's environmental record does give me cause for concern, it has been my practice to defer to presidents in considering nominees for Cabinet positions. Consistent with that practice, I will vote to confirm this nominee.

In his testimony before the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Governor Kempthorne stated his belief that “there is a no more beautiful cathedral than the outdoors.” I will take Governor Kempthorne at his word and hope that he will lead the Department of the Interior in a manner consistent with those words.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the vote on the nomination of Dirk Kempthorne, and following that vote that Senator LANDRIEU be recognized for 10 minutes, Senator STEVENS for 10 minutes, Senator REED for 10 minutes, to be followed by Senator BYRD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the nomination of Dirk Kempthorne, of Idaho, to be Secretary of the Interior?

The nomination was confirmed.

Mr. STEVENS. I move to reconsider the vote.

Mr. CRAIG. I move to lay that motion on the table.

The motion to lay on the table was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana is recognized for 10 minutes.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, I wish to speak about Governor Kempthorne's nomination, and now confirmation by this body, to be Secretary of the Interior, and I hope he will help us work through a compromise that has eluded this Nation for some 45 years.

The Secretary of the Interior is in a pivotal position to help bring reason and rationale to this debate. I think that we, by confirming him this morning, have put the right man in the job for what is ahead.

The Secretary of the Interior helps lead the debate and discussion about the Nation's energy policies. There are many facets of that policy, and it is multidimensional. It is one of the toughest issues faced by this Congress. Because it is so regional, it brings very passionate debate on both sides of the issue.

I was pleased to cast my vote this morning for Governor Kempthorne, a former Member of this body, and a man who has shown a great deal of ability in terms of mediating very difficult issues. He showed that skill when he was a Member of the Senate, and I have no doubt that he will show the same skill as he becomes Secretary of the Department of the Interior.

One of the issues on which I look forward to working with him and my colleagues is the issue I have spoken about so many times on the Senate floor relative to offshore oil and gas drilling, a balance, a partnership of mutual respect between the Gulf Coast States and the Nation regarding a partnership that is mutually beneficial.

As the Nation struggles to find new ways to produce oil and gas using the

great minds of this Nation and the great technology that has been developed; as the Nation needs so desperately more oil and more gas, particularly natural gas; with the prices so high so that supplies can be increased and, hopefully, demand can be reduced, prices can come down, prices can stabilize, and the entire economy, from the Midwest to the Northeast to the far West can benefit from that effort, I wanted to show a graph of what I am speaking about because I think a picture is worth a thousand words, and I know I only have a few more minutes. This is why I continue to come to the Senate floor to say that the gulf coast is America's only energy coast.

This represents the miles and miles of pipeline, rigs, and infrastructure that have been developed in the Gulf of Mexico since the first well was drilled off of Creole, LA, in the gulf in the 1940s. By the way, that community was just completely wiped out in the last hurricanes, Hurricanes Rita and Katrina. But right off of Creole, a tiny little community in southwest Louisiana, the first offshore oil platform was drilled. Subsequently, over decades this infrastructure has been built and it has been built better and better and stronger using better technology, and as a result this country has benefited significantly from this contribution.

Another way to look at it is the oil and gas leasing that has occurred—which Secretary Kempthorne will now be responsible for, how these leases occur, where they occur, and when they occur. As you can see, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas have served as hosts to this industry, and we have served proudly. But there is a crisis now in the Gulf of Mexico, and it was brought to the televisions of every American—every American—with the landfall of Katrina and Rita and the subsequent flooding.

This is the devastation that has occurred along the gulf coast, the flooding in the city of New Orleans and in communities throughout Louisiana, and the frightening and real erosion of America's only coastal wetlands the coastal wetlands of Louisiana. We have lost over a million square miles of wetlands, and we are losing 33 football fields a day. Thirty-three football fields a day are being lost in this great and extraordinary wetland.

When people say: Senator, how are the beaches in Louisiana?

I say: We don't have beaches in Louisiana. We love the beaches that are in Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi. We have vacationed on them our whole lives. But we have the greatest delta system in America, built over a million years by the Mississippi River itself, the land that we actually live on. On this land are great wetlands that supply fishing, that host and serve as the home of the mighty Mississippi River, and serve as a platform for oil and gas.

As the Secretary will come to know, this oil and gas could not be retrieved or mined from the Gulf of Mexico with-

out the partnership of these Gulf Coast States. So what we are asking for is fairness. We are asking for a percentage, a percentage in dollars, from this drilling to come back into this area and help us restore our wetlands and invest in the infrastructure necessary to protect this great coast so that we can provide our people with a bright and strong economic future.

I am going to submit a longer statement for the RECORD. Again, I submit, looking at this chart, and just showing one more, that when we say the gulf coast is America's energy coast, these are the pipelines that come from the Gulf of Mexico. You can see even the Rocky Mountains. We are proud of the production that goes out West. We are proud of that production. But as you can see, a lot of our gas is coming from Canada and, hopefully, more of our gas will come from Alaska.

I see my friend and colleague from Alaska, the senior Senator, on the Senate floor. We hope we can get more gas from Canada and from Alaska because we need it. But I want people to see where the gas is coming from. The gas is coming from Louisiana, and if you want more of it, then, No. 1, help us to save our State from washing away in the gulf; and, No. 2, help us to share in some of these revenues that will go right back into these communities to support the industry and the people and the schools and the churches and the towns that make this all possible. And, if not, then go find your gas somewhere else. I mean that. Go find it somewhere else because we have a lot of it down here. We are happy to give it, but we need some respect and cooperation on this point.

The Senator from Alaska is here to speak, and I am going to be back later this afternoon to finish the remarks that I want to put in the RECORD. I see Secretary Kempthorne standing here. I appreciate him being on the floor to hear these remarks. I am looking forward to having him come to Louisiana. I said he is not much use to us with a broken foot, so he has to get that foot fixed and then come on back so we can take him out to offshore oil and gas rigs. He has promised to do that, and I am sure he will get up to Alaska sometime soon to see the great work that Alaska does. He, of course, is very familiar, having been the Governor of Idaho, with the West. But, Governor, we are looking forward to having you come down and visit us on the gulf coast.

I yield the floor.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator will now return to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alaska is recognized for 10 minutes.

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, I would like to change the order in terms of the time agreement. I ask that I be

recognized for 10 minutes. Following my presentation, Senator REED be recognized for 10 minutes, Senator SPECTER for 10 minutes, Senator BYRD for such time that he may require, and following Senator BYRD, Senator MCCONNELL be recognized for such time as he may require.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ENERGY

Mr. STEVENS. Mr. President, yesterday the House of Representatives passed the bipartisan American-Made Energy and Good Jobs Act. This bill directs the Secretary of the Interior to establish and implement a leasing program to enable the exploration, development, and production of Alaska's oil and gas resources in the Arctic Coastal Plain.

I come today to commend our House colleagues for taking this action. Opening the Coastal Plain to development will help stabilize energy prices, spur economic growth, and enhance our national security. The Coastal Plain is believed to be the second largest oilfield ever discovered in North America, capable of producing at least 1 million barrels of oil per day. The National Defense Council estimates the development of the resources in our Coastal Plain will create between 700,000 and 1 million American jobs.

A majority in both Houses of this Congress and 70 percent of all Americans support exploration and development of Alaska's Coastal Plain. Our Senate colleagues should join those in the House and act to authorize development of these domestic resources.

Going forward, the United States must increase domestic production to secure our energy independence. Our Nation is in the midst of an energy crisis. In 2003, gasoline cost \$1.56 per gallon. This week, prices at the pump are averaging \$2.88 per gallon in my State and in some places over \$4 a gallon.

In the 1990s, natural gas prices in the lower 48, as we call it, averaged \$2.50 per thousand cubic feet. Today, natural gas costs approximately \$6 per thousand cubic feet, more than twice as much. This situation will only grow more serious. It is estimated that our LNG imports will increase by 500 percent in the near future. We also now face increased competition for that LNG from foreign nations.

In the last 14 years, India's oil consumption has doubled. China was the second largest oil importer in the world in 2004. According to the Energy Information Administration, by 2025, the world energy consumption will increase by 57 percent.

Americans cannot conserve our way out of this problem, and we cannot suspend the law of supply and demand. If we continue to lock up our lands, this country will not have the energy needed to keep up with the global economy. Conservation and alternative fuels are part of the overall solution, but to end